DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 899 IR 057 201

AUTHOR Lichtenberg, Evelyn
TITLE Public Library Services and Outreach for the Homeless Population in Ohio.
PUB DATE 1998-05-00
NOTE 38p.; Master's Research Paper, Kent State University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Information; Community Information Services; *Homeless People; Information Dissemination; Information Networks; Library Extension; *Library Policy; Library Research; Library Role; *Library Services; *Outreach Programs; Program Descriptions; *Public Libraries; Referral; Rural Areas; Surveys; User Needs (Information)
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio; Research Results

ABSTRACT

This investigative study, through a questionnaire survey, was conducted to determine if public libraries in Ohio saw a need for library programs/outreach to the homeless, and if, indeed, any libraries had a structured program to serve the special needs of the homeless population. One library from each Ohio county was selected through systematic random sampling. Respondents established that few libraries had a structured program/services for the homeless, yet service/resource information was available as needed. One third of the 62 respondents indicated an interest in attending a conference on library services for the homeless. The majority of responses were from rural libraries that reported that few, if any, homeless persons were located in their vicinity. In this study, references to the profile of homeless people and the growing number existing in deplorable conditions were taken from studies made by government and private sector agencies. The literature review cites reports and studies of library services for the homeless as well as library outreach programs networked with non-library agencies. The comments and suggestions of the survey respondents reflected an overall interest in pursuing a study and implementation of programs/services for the homeless. Two appendices contain copies of the questionnaire and accompanying cover letter. (DLS)

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ED 423 899

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES AND OUTREACH FOR THE HOMELESS POPULATION IN OHIO

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State School of Library
And Information Science
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree Master of Library Science

By

Evelyn Lichtenberg

May, 1998

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ABSTRACT

This investigative study, through a questionnaire survey, was made to determine if public libraries in Ohio saw a need for library programs/outreach to the homeless, and if, indeed, any libraries had a structured program to serve the special needs of the homeless population.

One subject library from each Ohio county was selected through systematic random sampling.

With the scope of the questionnaire survey, the respondents established that few libraries had a structured program/services for the homeless, yet service/resource information was available as needed. One third of the sixty- two respondents indicated an interest in attending a conference on library services for the homeless.

In this survey, the majority of responses were from rural libraries who reported that few, if any, homeless persons were located in their vicinity.

In this study, references to the profile of homeless people and the growing number existing in deplorable conditions were taken from studies made by government and private sector agencies. The literature review cited reports and studies of library services for the homeless as well as library outreach programs networked with non-library agencies.

The comments and suggestions of the survey respondents reflected an overall interest in pursuing a study and implementation of programs and services for the homeless.

Master's Research Paper by

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B.M., Cleveland Institute of Music, 1957

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Dr. Lois Buttlar, my advisor, for her patience, guidance and encouragement. I also wish to thank Marge Hayden and the office staff for their help. The faculty has been most inspiring. Thank you all.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

A national study, in 1990, by the National Coalition for the Homeless,[1] ascertained that the number of homeless persons in the United Stated is increasing. As reported by Dowd,[2] among this group, estimated at three million people, are one million families with children.

The homeless population has increased substantially due to failure of actualization of planned care centers and halfway houses for mentally retarded, mentally disabled, physically handicapped, prisoners and other dependents who had been released from care institutions and prisons. The deinstitutionalization programs, in 1960-1970, planned to include: advanced drug therapy, network community care centers, and housing to integrate the formerly institutionalized into community living.

Several socioeconomic factors contributed to deinstitutionalized persons swelling the ranks of the homeless segment of our population.

The downward economic spiral brought cutbacks in government spending and construction of low cost housing. Added to this was the change of admissions criteria for mental institutions, resulting in thousands of people no longer eligible for admission.

In its 1990 Annual Report,[1] the Interagency Council on the Homeless reported profiles of the homeless population. The health of the homeless person was extremely poor. Adequate nutrition was unavailable due to low or no income. Drug or alcohol addiction and untreated mental and physical illnesses attributed to a short life expectancy and a high death rate.

In June 1996, Senator Paul D. Wellstone (Minnesota),[4] as member of the Rural Development Task Force, addressed the Senate regarding the growing number of homeless persons in rural areas. He discussed the economic conditions in the 1980s resulting in the loss of family farms, thereby displacing families, who are now homeless.

An in-depth exploration was made by the National Coalition for the Homeless[1] of two trends, which are primarily causal for the rise of homelessness in the past

15-20 years. Lack of housing and lack of employment account for the increase of homeless people, from 31.9 million in 1988 to 36.5 million in 1996.

Information leading to health care, housing, employment, education, training, literacy, and opportunities for stability are not easily available to persons in transit and with no fixed address. Opportunities and paths to personal stability are derived from news sources, periodicals, books, and social, health, and economic agencies. A homeless person has neither the funds nor permanency to receive data.

Providing access to information is a foundation and primary function of public libraries. Do homeless people have access to the services of a public library? Is the information in public libraries in Ohio available to the homeless population? Are libraries in Ohio providing information that is accessible to the homeless, and information, when utilized, that could be beneficial to the person seeking opportunities for personal care, employment, training and stability?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the nature and number of public libraries' services for homeless people in Ohio, by geographic region.

Definition of Terms

Homeless persons will include all age groups. Any person or group of people who are without the security and benefit of a permanent personal address are defined as homeless. Library outreach is used interchangeably with extension services and services to the disadvantaged and unserved.

Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to public libraries in Ohio. Therefore, the findings are not necessarily to be generalized to all public libraries.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Frances Smardo Dowd,[6] in 1993, began a national research project, since little research had been done on the services provided by public libraries for homeless children and families. Dowd's research objectives were to identify successful public library services and to determine how librarians perceived their role in this endeavor.

Methodology in the intensive research project consisted of two questionnaires, preliminary and final. The questionnaires were constructed to allow responses to be subjectively reflecting the libraries' policies and active involvement with children in homeless families. Activities fell into four basic categories of service: special programs/services; work with parents/caregivers; work with agencies; and provisions for a nonjudgmental, supportive, welcoming place/space.

In surveying librarians' perceptions, subjective responses defined some shared goals and shared words of advice. Results of the Dowd survey identified three especially innovative libraries: Orange County Public Library, De Kalb County (Georgia), and Cambridge (Massachusetts) Public Library. Additionally, the programs of Project Open Book (in forty-one states) and Tampa-Hillsborough County (Florida) Public Library's Services to Children with special Needs were featured. Ms. Dowd's article concludes with examples of the positive results brought about through library services to children in homeless families. In place services included: maintaining a directory of community shelters, transporting children to the library, availability of homework help, programs for parents, waiving identification documentation for library cards, and waiving fines.

The De Kalb County Public Library in Decatur, Georgia provides services to families in eight homeless shelters through Project Horizons. In 1994, the scope and breadth of the project and benefits to shelter residents brought Urban Libraries Council's first Award of Excellence for Project Horizons.

Sherry Des Enfants Norfolk[7] writes of the need to add computers to the library's outreach programs, which had consisted of frequent visits of staff to shelters. Telling stories, reading aloud and coaching parents in reading interaction with children was welcomed by the shelter residents. However, shelter residents, children and adult, were at a further disadvantage in the world of school and employment for lack of computer literacy.

Ms. Norfolk's article discusses the planning, funding, and staffing of the computers and labs that were set up to add to library service at the shelters. This article sets practical guides for library services in shelters for the homeless.

As former Director of Library and Community Services for the City of Beverly Hills, California, Michael Cart[8] speaks of non-traditional library patrons. He describes patrons, from those who were mentally in their own sphere, to patrons who entered and used the library to extricate themselves from an unstable life. An example is the homeless ex-con whose use of the library eventually helped him become a full time free-lance writer, and who attributed this transformation to the environment within the library.

Mr. Cart cites the demographic profile of the homeless as reported by U.S. conference of Mayors in 1990. Urban homeless population: single men-51%, families with children-34%, single women-12%, and unaccompanied youth-3%. Within these numerical categories are: African-Americans-46%, White-34%, Hispanic-15%, substance abusers-38%, mentally ill-30%, and chronically unemployed-76%.

To balance the fragmentation of today's society, Cart stresses the need of today's library to become a center for community, for refuge and openness to all.

Davis and Fitzgerald[9] explore opposing viewpoints regarding librarians' responsibilities to the homeless. They refer to Herbert S. White's view of the "suicide path of libraries becoming a parking lot" for the homeless, a view which is bolstered by homeless patron Richard Kreimer vs. Joint Free Library of Morristown, New Jersey.

Since the homeless are totally without conventional resources, the authors state that libraries can become part of the solution to homelessness by networking with social service agencies, and by providing referral materials for the basic needs of health, housing, education, training, and employment.

Ruth Mast's[10] article in *Ohio Libraries* is the analysis of response to a survey of libraries throughout Ohio. This survey was composed and distributed in early 1991 by The Task force of Library Services to the Homeless.

The objective of the survey included an overview of library services to the homeless, clarification of definition of homeless persons, policy, and guidelines of libraries, plans for positive programs and library personnel awareness of the homeless.

The 119 responses received are summarized in this article. They indicate some shared and some diverse views on service, policies, and training of staff in services to the homeless.

Although approximately one-half of the responses indicate library services are available for homeless people, the responses were decidedly uneven on other issues. Negative response was predominant for library cards issued to a person with no address, and for having a written policy for services to the homeless. Most respondents answered positively for providing reference service to the homeless and providing referrals to homeless agencies. Public libraries accounted for most responses

and most indicated that further information on this topic would be welcome.

A study by Judith I. Boyce and Bert R. Boyce[11] of rural libraries found outreach programs of libraries in rural areas provide services not to homeless but to unserved persons who cannot come to the central library because of distance, lack of transportation, and confinement at home for various reasons.

Rural libraries are so categorized in communities of 2500 people or less. Rural libraries tend to have low budgets but do provide services through electronic technology, books by mail and 'state of the art' bookmobiles. New bookmobiles are being designed with CDRom full-text and internet capabilities.

A recent study by Lori M. Mertal[12] has been made to examine library policy when confronted with the situation of problem patrons. In defining problem patrons, Mertal has determined that a significant number of non-traditional library users suffered from mental illness and homelessness.

Four public libraries in the Akron/Summit County area were selected for study. The interview methodology which was used investigated what problems were created by this

group of patrons, the significance of these problems to the library, attitude of librarians toward these issues, and what procedure was implemented by the library to prevent crime and severe behavioral problems caused by this segment of patrons.

A content analysis study of thirty-six fiction and nonfiction books for children and young adults was made in 1996 by Wendy J. Grossholz.[13] If the homeless person was the main character, an analysis was made of race, sex, age, and how the character was portrayed. Also, subject to this analysis was the reading level of the selected materials. The books selected were culled from a larger grouping, whose subject matter or secondary subject illustrated persons, and families experiencing homelessness, but who were not the main character. Therefore the books selected for this study were specifically representative of a larger group addressing the state of homelessness.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Investigation in this study focused on public library programs/services for the homeless in Ohio.

The research method used for this study was a questionnaire survey of Ohio public libraries. All counties in Ohio were represented in the questionnaire survey mailing.

The Directory of Ohio Libraries[14] was used as a basis in selecting subject public libraries. Libraries were selected by using a systematic random sampling. In the Directory, library systems are listed within each of the eighty-eight Ohio counties. In counties having more than one library system, an arbitrary counting number was consistently used to identify which library would be selected in that specific county.

The selected subject libraries were then checked against an Ohio map of counties to ensure representation of each county in the state.

The survey material that was mailed to the subject libraries consisted of a cover letter (see Appendix A) and questionnaire (see Appendix B). The cover letter explained the reason for the study, introduced the researcher, and

assured the anonymity of the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of nineteen questions. The structure of the questions were such that some information/response would be based on degree, some yes/no, and some which could be answered with a descriptive narrative/opinion.

CHAPTER IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA

A questionnaire survey sent to 88 libraries on Ohio resulted in 62 responses, for an overall 71% rate of response.

Questions one and two established the demographic profile of the subject library. Questions three and four addressed interest in attending a conference on public library services for the homeless if one were planned, and any specific library program for the homeless now in place, respectively.

The question of library location was addressed by all sixty-two respondents. The number of libraries in rural areas, 46 (69%) was more than twice as many as the sum total of libraries in the 9 urban (13%) and in the 12 (18%) suburban areas reporting. Five libraries reported that they serviced more than one classified area, adjusting responses to library location to a total of 67.
Responses to the size of collection showed that there was a fairly equal amount of libraries in each of the three collection size categories. Twenty one (34%) libraries had

collections of under 50,000, twenty three (37%) had collections of 50,000 to 100,000, and 18 (29%) had collections of over 100,000.

Not all respondents addressed each question, as can be seen by 57 (91.94%) responses to the question of attending a conference on Public Library Services for the Homeless. The survey indicated that about 1/3 of the libraries contacted would attend a conference. Specifically, 13 (20.97%) answered that they would attend and 44 (77%) answered that they would not attend. One of the 44 respondents noted that they might encourage a service librarian to attend.

Of the sixty responses to the question of whether the library has a specific program/services for the homeless, 100% indicated that they did not. One of the 60 libraries responding added additional information about a grant from LSTA that was just received. With these funds, this library plans to place a children's collection in the homeless shelter and provide storytime there.

The question of library staff specialist brought a response from one librarian who reported that there was no designated staff person to assist homeless persons in their library.

One (1.61%) response was received to the question of library card application and identification required. This library waives that requirement for patrons who appear to be homeless.

A total of 58 (93.55%) responses were tallied as to whether the library ever had a service program for the homeless and that the program is now discontinued. All 58 (100%) responses indicated that such a program was never in place.

Questions which asked why the subject library had no programs/services for the homeless brought a total of 30 (48%) responses indicating that there were no homeless people in that library's location area. Of these thirty respones, four (13.33%) replied that no budget allocation was available. Lack of staff interest was indicated by 4 (13.33%) libraries. Fear of materials being lost was listed by 1 (3.33&) library.

Twenty-four (39%) libraries utilized the opportunity to express other reasons, descriptions of circumstances, and discussion of why their library does not have a program/services for the homeless. Among these were several reoccurring motifs that mirrored the statement of "no homeless in our area".

Thirteen (54.15%)of the 24 responses listed that there was no demand or need, there were very few homeless, that there was not a significant number of homeless to justify a program, and that no need of such a program was perceived.

Four (16.67%) respondents mentioned lack of staff. Two (8.33%) libraries stated that they simply have not planned any program/services for the homeless.

Other narrative comments included: homeless persons can use existing services; many local resources are available to handle the homeless; this is not a library function, other agencies can help these people; we have not made a connection/partnership with a homeless shelter as of now; we have regular contact with Path Center, which provides services for the homeless through distribution of information on library services; and, we never thought of it--thanks for the nudge.

Some respondents to the questionnaire had additional comments, reflecting their thoughts and concern of the subject surveyed.

Although one library had stated that they have no staff for a program serving the needs of the homeless, this library did provide services to the few homeless who visited the library. The library materials that were

requested in these instances addressed issues of employment, education/training, and literacy. Frequency of visits at this library was twice a month. The homeless patrons usually spent less than 2 hours per visit.

One survey respondent further described the setting of the library. This subject library is in a rural county with a population of 20,000. The main occupations in the area are agriculture and light industry. The county provides services for the indigent. If a homeless population would exist, the library would address the issue.

Another respondent states that their services are provided to all citizens equally. Their library provides no special programs for welfare recipients, WIC mothers, fire fighters, or veterans. The opinion of the respondent is that there are many social service agencies to meet the demands of these people, as well as the homeless.

One library's comment was an outline and discussion of possible programs and services which could be developed. The writer of these comments stated that this survey has given her energy to ascertain possible library outreach through visits to shelters, bookmobile service, and mobile and rotating collections.

A rural library stated that there were services available in bureaus of concern, the Salvation Army and St. Vincent Society. In-library visits by homeless persons occurred 7-10 times per month. Visits were 2-4 hours. All visitors were over 18 and male. Materials requested were on subjects of housing and literacy. More services would be provided by this library if the need warranted it.

A library that has very few homeless donates discarded library materials to a homeless shelter. This library would like to add children's programs for homeless children, even if there were only a few.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were public libraries in Ohio that provided programs/services for homeless persons. The method of investigation was a questionnaire survey of one library in each county in Ohio. The researcher received sixty-two responses for a response rate of 71%.

Although it was found that no library had a specifically planned program/services for the homelessness, many had an unstructured accommodation and informational assistance for homeless persons who visited the library. Some libraries provided informational and materials services through outreach.

The majority of respondents to this survey were from libraries located in rural areas. Comments and responses

to structured questions indicated that homeless persons were not evident in the area of the responding library. Yet, as library literature, government, and homeless coalition reports indicate, homelessness is quite evident in this country. The findings of the studies on public library involvement through program/services for children and adults indicate that partnering and outreach to the homeless population bring positive results.

Most respondents who added comments indicated that their library provided information and referrals to social agencies that would be helpful in matters of housing, employment, health, and literacy.

Positive responses regarding attending a projected conference on public library service for the homeless was indicative of the attitude of librarians in addressing the informational/reference needs of homeless patrons.

APPENDIX A

School of Library and Information Science
(330) 672-2782
Fax (330) 672-7965

Kent STATE UNIVERSITY
P. O. Box 5190, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

Re: Survey of Public Library Services for the Homeless Population

April 10, 1998

Dear Library Director:

I am a graduate student in the School of Library and Information Science at Kent State University. As part of the requirements for my master's degree I am conducting a study of public library services for the homeless population in Ohio. The enclosed questionnaire will provide information of library services available to the homeless in our state. This information would be useful to library planning and administration, social service agencies and the homeless population.

Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, as you do not need to sign your name to individual questionnaires; only the investigator has access to the survey data. There is no penalty of any kind if you should choose to not participate in this study. While your cooperation is quite important to the success of this study, it is, of course, voluntary. A copy of the results of the study will be available upon request.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at (216) 321-3568 or Dr. Lois Buttlar, my research advisor, at (330) 672-2782. If you have any further questions regarding research at Kent State University you may contact Dr. M. Thomas Jones, at (330) 672-2851.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to me at the address below. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Lichtenberg

Evelyn Lichtenberg, Graduate Student

3300 Hyde Park
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

APPENDIX B

Survey of Public Library Services
For the Homeless Population

1. Our library is situated in an:

   __urban area __suburban __rural

2. The size of our collection is: less than 50,000_____

   __ less than 50,000 __ 50,000 to 100,000 __more than 100,000

3. Would you attend a conference on Public Library Services for the Homeless?

   __yes __ no

4. Our library has a specific program/services for the homeless.

   __yes __ no

If response to question 4 is yes, please continue.
If response to question 4 is no, please proceed to question 17.

5. We provide services to the homeless:
   __ Only in the library __ Only in a non-library setting (outreach)
   __ Both in library and non-library setting

6. Please identify type of non-library settings/agencies where library services to homeless are available. _____
   _____

7. In your opinion, what percent of the homeless serve are
   __over 18 __under 18

8. Gender percentage __male

9. Frequency of in library visits per month is _____.

10. Frequency of outreach programs per month is _____.

11. Number of hours per visit:
    __less than 2 hours __2 hours to less than 4 hours __more than 4 hours

12. Materials requested of issues of:
    __housing __employment __education/training __literacy __legal
    __other_____

13. Number of homeless persons utilizing services per week
__less than 100 __101-200 __over 300

14. Our library has a staff specialist for this program. __yes __no

15. Our library waives identification for library card application. __yes __no

16. What services would you like to add to or remove from your current services program for the homeless_____

17. Our library did have a service program for the homeless and it is now discontinued. __yes __no

18. We do not have a program because
__we have no homeless in our area __no budget allocation available
__lack of staff interest __fear of lost materials __other_____

19. Is a service program for the homeless being planned?
__yes __no

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Thank you. Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope to Evelyn Lichtenberg
3300 Hyde Park
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

ENDNOTES

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